United Nations A/C.1/54/PV.2

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

First Committee

2nd Meeting
Thursday, 23 September 1999, 10.30 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. R. González ..... (Chile)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset of these deliberations I should like to express my deep appreciation to all Members of the United Nations for the honour and privilege they have conferred upon me and my country by electing me Chairman of this body of the Assembly. I thank them all most warmly for the confidence they have placed in me. I shall endeavour to conduct the work of this important body of the General Assembly in a manner that measures up to that confidence.

I also wish to express my sincere appreciation for the kind words of the Ambassador of Belgium when he nominated me at the first meeting of the Committee. I ask him to kindly convey, on behalf of the Committee and on my own behalf, our sincere gratitude to my predecessor, Ambassador André Mernier, for the able and efficient manner in which he presided over the work of the Committee last year and for his important contribution to the results achieved by the First Committee during the fifty-third session of the General Assembly. The tasks assigned to the First Committee are not easy, and I will therefore count on the full and invaluable cooperation of all delegations. For my part, I will always be available to assist them in carrying out the work of the Committee.

It is gratifying for me to know that I can count also on the invaluable experience, competence and extensive knowledge of Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs; Mr. Jin Yongjian, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services; and the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Lin Kuo-chung, and his colleagues from the Secretariat. I am certain that the Committee will benefit from their experience, and we look forward to their support in dealing with the very many pressing issues confronting us.

According to the agenda for today's meeting, the Committee should be proceeding to the election of officers of the Committee, namely three Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur, and to the adoption of the programme of work and time-table for the current session. I have spoken with the delegations that are interested in holding the post of Vice-Chairman or Rapporteur during this session of the Committee, but a consensus has not yet been reached. Furthermore, those delegations have asked for a waiting period because there is a good chance that they will reach agreement among themselves.

I think, therefore, that the most reasonable thing to do is to ask those delegations — Germany, Sudan, Lithuania and the Philippines — to continue their consultations so that we can resolve this problem, which, though of a procedural nature, has an impact on the substantive discussions of the Committee. We will therefore defer until later the deliberations on the election of the Vice-Chairmen and the Rapporteur.

Organization of work

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): May I draw your attention to document A/C.1/54/1, containing a letter dated 17 September 1999 from the President of the General Assembly, informing me that the General Assembly had

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decided at its plenary meeting to allocate agenda items 64 to 85 to the First Committee for its consideration.

Before proceeding to the proposed programme of work and time-table, as contained in document A/C.1/54/CRP.1, I wish to recall that at the open-ended informal meeting of the First Committee held two days ago, on 21 September 1999, the Committee tentatively reached agreement — which I hope will not have to be changed — on the Committee's programme of work and time-table for this session, on which I should like to comment.

In preparing the proposed programme of work and time-table, account was taken of the various useful initiatives of recent years, including the Assembly's decision 52/416 B on the rationalization of the work of the Committee. Consequently, I have tried to devise a programme of work and time-table based on the following.

Members may recall that, in accordance with established practice, the First Committee begins its substantive work only after the conclusion of the general debate in the plenary meetings of the General Assembly, which is currently under way. Furthermore, the President of the General Assembly appealed to the Chairmen of the main Committees to conclude their work by 29 November, in order to enable the plenary of the Assembly to consider the reports of the Main Committees during the early part of December.

Accordingly, as I indicated at the informal meeting, we should organize our programme in accordance with decision 52/416 B on rationalization of the work of the Committee. Thus, at the request of the majority of the membership, the First Committee's substantive session will run from Monday, 11 October, to Friday, 12 November, giving us a total of five weeks in which to hold 31 meetings. I am sure that if we make a genuine and concerted effort to fully and efficiently utilize the conference facilities available to us, the Committee can accomplish its tasks without undue difficulty. In view of coordination issues and of the serious financial problems of the Organization, every effort will be made to avoid night or weekend meetings. Here I would call upon the constructive spirit of all delegations to try to avoid holding meetings that could prove fruitless.

As it did last year, the First Committee will begin its substantive session with a general debate on all disarmament and related international security agenda items, namely, items 64 and 65 and 67 to 85, with a total of 10 meetings to be held from Monday, 11 October, to Wednesday, 20 October.

In this regard, I appeal to delegations to kindly limit the time for the delivery of their statements, if at all possible, to 15 minutes. I urge them to make a special effort to respect that limit, which I think allows them more than enough time to adequately present their substantive points of view, so that all of the members of the First Committee wishing to participate in the debate can do so.

I also invite those delegations wishing to participate in the general debate to inscribe their names on the list of speakers as soon as possible in order to enable the Committee to fully and constructively utilize all the time and resources available to it. Furthermore, it should be noted that the deadline for the closure of the list of speakers for the general debate on all disarmament and related international security agenda items is 6 p.m. on Monday, 11 October, the day the general debate begins. The list is now open.

From Thursday, 21 October, to Friday, 29 October, the First Committee will hold thematic discussions on item subjects and there will be the introduction and consideration of all draft resolutions submitted under agenda items 64, 65 and 67 to 85. A total of eight meetings will be set aside for this stage of the Committee's work, exactly the same number of meetings as last year.

Here I should like to add a personal note. The thematic discussions should be truly thematic. They should relate to the topics to be studied, and not be a simple repetition of the general debate; to do otherwise would be to diminish the substance of the work of this important United Nations Committee, which has been growing in relevance.

The deadline for the submission of draft resolutions on all disarmament and related international security agenda items is 6 p.m. on Friday, 22 October. I ask members to cooperate in adhering strictly to that deadline. Delegations are strongly encouraged to submit and introduce their draft resolutions as early as possible.

Six p.m. on Friday, 22 October, really is the final deadline. I do not want the Bureau to have to negotiate with delegations over last-minute extensions for draft resolutions, as normally such draft resolutions relate to topics that have been discussed, elaborated or analysed well in advance. We do not want new issues that are so pressing that they suddenly arise on 22 October. I therefore repeat,

because I want it to be very clear from the outset for all delegations, that there will be no extension or grace period beyond 22 October. It will be recalled that at our meeting on 21 September we made a concession at the request of the delegation of Mexico with regard to the possibility of leaving room for urgent draft resolutions until 22 October, but in principle the intended deadline was 21 October. I hope that there will be no requests for special extensions.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the Committee agrees that the absolute deadline is 6 p.m. on 22 October.

It was so decided.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I should like to ask delegations to cooperate in adhering strictly to that deadline.

Delegations are also strongly encouraged to submit and introduce their draft resolutions as early as possible. This is convenient for delegations themselves, as it gives them the possibility of negotiations and a timely presentation of items. Furthermore, it is imperative that delegations submit those draft resolutions that could entail programme budget implications as early as possible in order to enable the secretariat to prepare the necessary programme budget implications on time. In that way, the Committee can take action on them with a view to meeting the mandatory deadline required for submission to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. In this regard, I would like to indicate that the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and the Fifth Committee need adequate time to review the programme budget implications of a draft resolution before the latter can be acted upon by the Assembly.

During the period from Monday, 1 November, to Thursday, 9 November, the First Committee will proceed to take action on all draft resolutions submitted under disarmament and related international security agenda items. A total of 10 meetings will be available to the Committee for that stage of its work.

Finally, on the basis of the logic of combining the disarmament and related international security agenda items, item 66, entitled "Question of Antarctica", will have to be dealt with during the latter part of the Committee session. Three meetings have been allocated for the general debate on that item and consideration of and action on draft resolutions submitted under it — from Wednesday, 10 November, to Friday, 12 November. The deadline for the submission of draft resolutions under that item will be 6 p.m on Wednesday, 10 November.

Based on the proposed programme of work and timetable that I have just briefly outlined, the First Committee should be able to conclude consideration of all the agenda items allocated to it within the time frame to which I have referred. It is my earnest hope that this programme of work and timetable, arrived at after due consultation and in accordance with precedent, will meet with the approval of the members of the Committee.

If I hear no objection, I shall take it that the First Committee adopts the programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/54/CRP.1.

It was so decided.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I should now like to draw attention to the relevant rules and recommendations of the General Assembly affecting the work of the Main Committees, including those contained in decision 34/401.

In order to efficiently and fully utilize the time and conference resources available to the Committee, I should like to convene the meetings of the Committee at 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. sharp and adjourn at 1 p.m. and 6 p.m. respectively. I wish to emphasize the importance of punctuality in the interest of ensuring an effective and orderly organization of our work and achieving economies for the Organization.

At the same time, I wish to point out that I shall convene meetings only if there is a sufficient number of speakers inscribed on the list of speakers to address the Committee so that we fully utilize the conference facilities available in the most efficient and effective manner possible. The resources allocated to a meeting cancelled at an appropriate time may be released for other meetings held within or outside the framework of the First Committee.

I should now like to make a strong personal appeal. I have a great deal of respect for all the members of the Committee. Some I know, and others I do not. But all representatives have the right to deliver their statements as calmly as possible, without any interruption. The contribution of every member is important for this Committee and should therefore be heard with great respect by the other members. As a result, I urge representatives to listen to speakers with due respect.

In that context, I will ask members to avoid the use of cellular telephones except in cases of great emergency. The United Nations lived without cell phones for half a century without any problem, and our meetings proceeded in perfect harmony. But there has recently been an outbreak of "cellulitis": people use cell phones in every meeting, not always for purposes that are as important as the statement being made. I think it is disrespectful to a speaker for the representative in the next seat to be carrying on a telephone conversation, especially since there is an excellent telephone system only a few metres away from this conference room. I hope everyone will cooperate in this, thus treating the First Committee with the seriousness it deserves. We must surely agree that the disarmament and security issues before us call for ever greater seriousness. Here, there are no small, medium-sized or large countries; every member of this Committee is an important country that has a contribution to make. As far as the Bureau is concerned, the statements of all members will be received with the seriousness they merit, and the Bureau will be at the disposal of all members and will cooperate with them fully.

I call on the Secretary of the Committee.

Mr. Lin Kuo-chung (Secretary of the Committee): With regard to organization of work, I wish to draw the attention of the Committee to the following points. First, for the current session, the General Assembly has decided to depart once again from the rule that one quarter of the members must be present before a meeting of a Main Committee may be declared open and the debate be permitted to proceed. The General Assembly made that recommendation on the understanding that this departure from the rules did not involve any permanent change in the relevant provision of rule 108 [67] of the Rules of Procedure of the General Assembly, pertaining to the quorum, whereby the presence a majority of members is required for any decision to be taken.

Secondly, as indicated in the programme of work and timetable contained in document A/C.1/54/CRP.1, the list of speakers for the general debate on all disarmament and related international security agenda items will be closed on Monday, 11 October 1999, at 6 p.m. A number of delegations have already added their names to the list. In order to enable the First Committee fully to utilize the time and conference facilities available to it, all those delegations wishing to participate in the general debate are kindly requested to place their names on the list of speakers, which is with the Secretariat, at their earliest convenience. For the purpose of providing conference services, delegations are requested to provide a minimum of 30 copies of all prepared statements to the Conference Officers. For general distribution, a total of 250 copies will be required.

Thirdly, I would like to appeal to members of the Committee to submit draft resolutions, especially those draft resolutions that have programme budget implications, as soon as possible in order to allow sufficient time for the preparation by the Secretariat of the estimated costs and for consideration by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions and by the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly. Undoubtedly, this would facilitate the work of the Secretariat in processing draft resolutions so as to make them available to the Committee as soon as possible. Moreover, I wish to emphasize that draft resolutions, amendments and the names of sponsors thereof should be submitted to the Secretariat in writing to ensure accuracy and to avoid any possible misunderstandings.

Fourthly, I understand that various regional groups and/or protocol groups will hold consultation meetings during the session. In this regard, requests for the use of conference rooms for group meetings should be submitted in writing as early as possible so that the necessary arrangements can be made in time.

Fifthly, I would also like to draw the attention of members of the Committee to General Assembly decision 34/401, and particularly to its provisions concerning explanations of votes and statements in exercise of the right of reply, namely paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 of that decision.

Sixthly, as to documentation of the First Committee, I should like to draw the Committee's attention to document A/C.1/54/INF.1, which will be issued at a later date. That document will list, for purposes of information and ready reference, all documents before the First Committee issued as of 4 October 1999. That list will be updated as appropriate.

Finally, I would like to ask delegations kindly to submit to the Secretariat a list of the members of their delegations as soon as possible so that the list of the membership of the Committee can be circulated at the earliest possible time.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I call on the representative of Kazakhstan.

Ms. Arystanbekova (Kazakhstan): First of all, Sir, I would like to congratulate you on your election to your

high post, and to express my confidence that under your able leadership the First Committee will successfully fulfil its task of finding mutually acceptable solutions to the complex issues on its agenda. You can fully rely on the support and cooperation of the delegation of Kazakhstan.

Today, I would like to take this opportunity to address the First Committee with words of gratitude to all my colleagues. After eight years, I am completing my work here as the first-ever Permanent Representative of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations. During seven consecutive sessions of the General Assembly I have had the honour to head my country's delegation to the First Committee. I had the good fortune to prepare my country's admission to membership of the United Nations and to speak on that historic day, 2 March 1992, from the high rostrum of the General Assembly, on behalf of my people and of the President of Kazakhstan. I took part in the proceedings of the General Assembly for the first time at its forty-fifth session, as a member of the Soviet delegation and as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan.

Back in 1990 it was beyond anybody's imagination that in a little more than a year my country, along with seven other former Soviet Republics, would become a full-fledged Member of this world Organization. I will never forget the genuine expressions of goodwill and support for my country on the part of United Nations Member States. My first statement in the United Nations was made nine years ago before the First Committee, on 23 October 1990, on behalf of the Soviet delegation, on the issue of nuclear testing.

I stated then that Kazakhstan, where a nuclear testing ground had been built and had operated for 40 years, was unfortunate to learn first hand what it was all about. I called on the nuclear- weapon States to proclaim a moratorium on nuclear testing. I am very proud of the contribution to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation that has been made by my country, which became the first ever to close down a nuclear testing ground and voluntarily gave up its nuclear capacity, once the fourth largest in the world. Throughout the seven years of my work in the First Committee, I have felt that the United Nations Member States truly appreciate this contribution. As a recently admitted fully fledged member of the Conference on Disarmament, Kazakhstan will be working even more vigorously with other Member States to address the issues of disarmament and consolidation of the non-proliferation regime.

Today I want to express my deepest gratitude to all my colleagues for their support for and constructive cooperation with the delegation of Kazakhstan. I became especially aware of this when I was a Vice-Chairman of the First Committee at the recently concluded fifty-third session of the General Assembly. I am proud of the fact that I became the first woman in the history of the United Nations to be elected to the Bureau of the First Committee. I am leaving the United Nations with a feeling of the deepest gratitude to, and the highest respect for, our Organization and with a belief in its future, because the whole world really needs it; because my own country really needs it.

Let me wish you, Mr. Chairman, and all my colleagues and friends here, well-being and new accomplishments in your very challenging and noble activities aimed at making the world a better and safer place in the next century.

The Chairman (*spoke in Spanish*): I especially thank the distinguished Ambassador of Kazakhstan for her very kind words addressed to me and my Bureau colleagues. I am sure that I convey the thoughts of all the members of the Committee when I say that we will truly regret her departure. I was her colleague last year, as a Vice-Chairman, and I became aware of her very effective work. But she is paying the price for her effectiveness, and therefore I say with complete certainty that her future will become every day more and more important, in spite of how important her work here has been. We wish her all the best.

The meeting rose at 11.15 a.m.